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UNCLAS GUANGZHOU 032090

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USDOC FOR 4410/ITA/MAC/MCQUEEN
USPACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [ECON](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: FREE TRAVEL TO HAINAN - ALMOST

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: According to officials from the Sanya Foreign Affairs Office and Tourism Bureau, Hainan's landing visa and visa waiver programs are intended to increase tourism to Hainan, particularly from East Asia. Americans are permitted to travel to Hainan without a visa if they are part of a group, but may not do so individually. This restriction was instituted in response to the U.S. visa fingerprinting requirement. END SUMMARY.

LANDING VISA AND VISA WAIVER POLICIES IN HAINAN

¶2. (U) Hainan's landing visa program is unique to Hainan and applies only there. According to official policy, travelers from countries and regions with diplomatic or official trade relations with China may visit Hainan for up to 15 days for business or pleasure simply by obtaining a landing visa upon arrival in Haikou or Sanya. Travelers wishing to visit other parts of China or extend their stay must apply with local authorities to change their status. Countries that are not eligible for the landing visa include the United States, United Kingdom, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lankan, Turkey, Pakistan, Nigerian, and Afghanistan.

¶3. (U) There is also a visa waiver program in Hainan. Groups of 5 or more are allowed to stay in Hainan for up to 15 days without obtaining a Chinese visa provided they meet two criteria. First, each group must book through a certified travel agency, which is required to pass a name list and travel schedule to local customs officials prior to the group's arrival. Second, participants must be nationals from one of the following 21 countries: United States, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, Philippines, Indonesia, Germany, England, France, Australia, Italy, Russia, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Holland, Canada, Austria, and New Zealand.

VISA POLICY TARGETS RUSSIAN, KOREAN, AND JAPANESE TOURISTS

¶4. (U) Pei Ke Shan, Vice Director of the Sanya Foreign Affairs Office, made clear that the targets of the landing visa and visa-free policies are high net worth tourists from Russia, Japan, and Korea. Officials are measuring success in terms of increasing tourism from these countries. Mr. Pei offered the following statistics. From January to August, 2006, 46,000 Russian tourists and business travelers visited the island, up 190 percent from the same period in 2005. Korean tourism was up 80% for the same period. While he did not offer numbers on tourists from Japan, he said they were comparable.

COMMENT

¶5. (U) Due to the unilateral implementation of fingerprinting of all foreign visitors by the USG, the Chinese government stopped issuing landing visas to American travelers to Hainan in March 2004. However, Americans still qualify for the visa waiver program

provided they travel in a qualifying tour group and do not stay more than 15 days. The March 2004 ban appears to be much more symbolic than functional.

GOLDBERG